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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1974, graduating seniors from Macalester College were sent a questionnaire surveying their reactions to their college experiences and their plans for the future. Seniors were overwhelmingly satisfied with their total experience at the college, viewing academic and interpersonal experiences as the most valuable elements. Nearly 50 percent of the 1974 graduates expected to enter graduate or professional schools in the fall of 1974. Business and teaching were attracting the largest percentage of those intending to work full-time after graduation. A comparison was made between the satisfactions and plans of the 1973 and 1974 graduating seniors. (Author)

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Macalester College

RESEARCH REPORT

Office of Research and Planning

Research Report #70 August, 1974

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Abstract

In the spring of 1974, graduating seniors from Macalester College were sent a questionnaire surveying their reactions to their college experiences and their plans for the future. Seniors were overwhelmingly satisfied with their total experience at the College viewing academic and interpersonal experiences as the most valuable elements. Nearly one-half of the 1974 graduates expected to enter graduate or professional schools in the fall of 1974. Business and teaching were attracting the largest percentage of those intending to work full-time upon graduation. A comparison was made between the satisfactions and plans of the 1973 and 1974 graduating seniors.

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Macalester Seniors: 1973 and 1974

Janis H. Weiss

In the spring of 1970, the Office of Research and Planning began surveying graduating seniors at Macalester. The 1970 graduating class was studied at the behest of the University of California-Berkeley Research and Development Center who asked that Macalester participate in a nation-wide study of college seniors. The original survey developed by the Berkeley R and D Center has been revised so that the items retained were most relevant to experiences students might or do have at Macalester.

The major purpose of this on-going project is to determine how students are affected by their Macalester education, at least as they perceived it in the waning moments. Items that covered student experiences and achievements, perceptions and evaluations of the College, educational outcomes, and aspirations and plans for the future have been emphasized.

This report is essentially a normative summary of the results from the 1974 senior questionnaire and a comparison with the 1973 senior responses.[1] Of the 338 seniors sent questionnaires in 1974, 207 were returned (61%).[2] Of these respondents, 52% were men and 48% were women. In 1973, 373 seniors received questionnaires and 242 (65%) were returned.

College Years

Academic Activities

The most important aspect of college for nearly all students was academic; course work took up the majority of their time and was the most

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[1]A report to follow will cover those items on which five years of data are available.

[2]About 60 additional questionnaires could not be delivered through regular campus mail channels. The majority of those not delivered were intended for December or January graduates who were no longer on campus.

satisfying. The typical student in both the 1973 and 1974 graduating classes spent his school time on the Macalester campus, taking a combination of course work and independent study. Over 90% of the seniors reported taking independent study credit. One-fourth of the seniors received credit for programs abroad and one-fifth spent one or more terms at another college or university. Most of the latter, however, were transfer students, not students who spent a term at another school in this country while enrolled at Macalester.

Seniors frequently reported acting as informal advisors, giving others recommendations on course selection based on their own experiences. Over 40% worked for a faculty member in activities such as tutoring, research, grading papers, and general departmental activities. Somewhere during the four years, close to one-half of the students changed majors and over one-half changed career choice. Evidentally the change in major was a positive choice since nearly all seniors reported their course work in their major field as being particularly meaningful.

A few students took a more active role in the educational process. Nearly one-fourth helped to initiate a new course, most often held during Interim Term. While only one-fifth actually worked on a student-faculty committee, two-thirds discussed educational or other campus issues with faculty members or brought their concerns before an administratively constituted committee.

In the academic activities areas, the only significant difference between the 1973 and 1974 graduating seniors was in the percentage who reported they had failed a course during their undergraduate years--only 12% of the 1973 seniors said they had while 20% of the 1974 group reported

failing a course. Fourteen percent of the 1974 graduates experienced some kinds of problems which led to their dropping out of college temporarily. This represented a small increase over the number of 1973 graduates (9%) "stopping out." Although it is too early to tell whether the "stopping out" phenomenon is on the increase among Macalester students, others involved in higher education are suggesting that it is.

Satisfactions

Students reported that the most rewarding endeavors during their college years were academic. They were satisfied with the College's academic reputation, the intellectual environment, faculty-student relations, classroom instruction, and the variety of possible courses which they could take. There was a consistent increase from 1973 to 1974 in the percentage who were satisfied with these academic aspects of the College, the greatest increases being in satisfaction with student-faculty relations (66% to 80%) and with the quality of classroom instruction (71% to 84%). (See Table 1) Nearly all students had participated in individual study and/or research and felt it played an important role in their academic life. Experiences abroad were also important for those who participated.

Interactions with other students formed a second very important area for Macalester graduates. They stressed the meaningfulness of developing friendships, talking with fellow students, and social activities. More formal arrangements such as clubs, athletics, student government, and other student activities were the least important component of their interactions with peers. However, there was a small increase between 1973 and 1974 in the proportion of seniors who found athletic endeavors important. The '74

graduates saw off-campus activities as far more important than on-campus clubs or activities. Based on an intensive analysis of colleges and universities, Stern (1970) has suggested that lack of participation in group activities is a typical pattern of small intellectually oriented liberal arts colleges.[1] Even though the importance of service was stressed by many at Macalester, only 9% said that these activities were important sources of satisfaction (33% said they were somewhat important) while at Macalester.

Seniors graduating in 1974 were overwhelmingly satisfied with their total college experience (30% very satisfied, 63% satisfied, 6% dissatisfied, 0% very dissatisfied), although many were critical of offices which support the academic enterprise. They were most critical of administrators in general although the 1974 seniors were slightly more satisfied than were the 1973 seniors. They were also dissatisfied with career guidance and academic advising but were somewhat more satisfied with opportunities for formal and informal personal counseling. Over one-half reported they had used one of the available campus counseling services. It was interesting to note that nearly one-half of the seniors felt that undergraduate education would be improved if more attention were paid to the emotional growth of the students.

Outcomes and Change

A variety of outcomes undoubtedly result from a college education. The 1974 seniors were presented with a list of 19 general outcomes and asked to what extent their experiences at Macalester contributed to their progress in these areas.[2] (See Table 2) The areas in which the graduates

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[1]Stern, G.G. People in context: Measuring person-environment congruence in education and industry. Wiley: N.Y., 1970 p. 112

[2]These items were developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and have been administered only to the 1974 seniors. In the next future we should be able to compare the responses of Macalester seniors with seniors in other liberal arts colleges.

saw themselves as having made the most progress represented a combination of intellectual-personal outcomes: "appreciation of individuality and independence of thought and action," "awareness of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life," "background and specialization for further education in a professional, scientific or scholarly field," "vocabulary, terminology, and facts in various fields of knowledge," and "understanding one's abilities and limitations, interests and standards of behavior." Those areas in which students perceived Macalester as having contributed least to their progress were in "skills and techniques directly applicable to a job," "moral and ethical standards," "understanding of concepts of probability, proportion, margin of error," "basis for improved social and economic status," and in "clear, correct effective communication." It is important to note that the majority of seniors felt they had been affected at least somewhat in all the areas covered.

When asked the extent to which they had changed since beginning college, the greatest change was indicated in areas similar to those mentioned in the "outcomes" items. (See Table 3) Students in 1974 were most likely to say they had increased in maturity (90%), self-awareness and insight (86%), intellectual interests in their field (81%), and intellectual interests in general (74%). Students felt they had changed least in political liberalism, acceptance of other racial groups, religious concerns and concern with social issues. Very few students reported decreasing in any of the areas listed although 27% did say they had decreased in their religious concerns, and 14% said their political concerns and acceptance of other racial groups had decreased.

There were a number of differences between the classes of 1973

and 1974, at least in the percent who felt they had increased in the listed attributes. A larger percentage of the 1974 graduates felt committed to a vocation while more 1973 seniors felt they had increased in political concerns, in their acceptance of other races, in political liberalism, esthetic interest, concern with social issues, awareness of ethical standards, and ability to form close relationships. A number of people have suggested that there is an increasing vocational orientation among liberal arts college students, perhaps made necessary by the difficulty graduates are having in getting into graduate or professional schools and also by the problems involved in finding adequate or relevant employment. It may be then that this more vocational outlook is beginning to take precedence over other areas and is taking its toll, particularly in a decrease in the service and interpersonal orientation of students.

In addition to seeing themselves as having changed, most seniors felt that the College had changed in the past four years. Sixty percent of the seniors graduating in 1974 said it had changed a lot or a great deal while only 8% said it had changed little or not at all. Two areas were singled out as accounting for the greatest differences. First, students felt that the administration had become more concerned with financial affairs and less concerned with academic affairs. Second, the seniors felt that the 1973 incoming freshmen were very different from them--less concerned about intellectual matters and less oriented toward helping others. Some felt that the changes in orientation of administrators were a direct result of the financial difficulties which hit the College (and most post-secondary institutions) and were thus necessary but temporary shifts. Others were equally

as philosophical about the perceived change in freshmen saying that probably the seniors of 1970 said the same thing about them. It was interesting to note that the 1974 graduating seniors at Grinnell College[1] had the same criticisms and perceived the same changes in their college as did the Macalester seniors. This suggests that these perceptions were not unique to Macalester seniors nor were they necessarily related to the change in administration which occurred at Macalester since none had occurred at Grinnell during the preceding four years.

Career Plans

Nearly one-half of the respondents in both 1973 and 1974 expected to be employed full-time during the coming year while most of the remaining were planning to attend graduate or professional schools. About 10% of those employed were planning to attend school part-time. In terms of long-range plans, about 5% expected to be content with their B.A. degree while over 75% were aiming for a professional or advanced academic degree. More of the 1974 than 1973 graduates were intending to attend graduate school in the fall (31% to 16%) and a somewhat higher percentage foresaw their long-range plans as including a Ph.D. degree (35% to 29%).

Of those 1974 graduates heading toward full-time employment after graduation, business (12%) and teaching (8%) seemed to be most attractive, perhaps because a particular course of study within a liberal arts setting translated more adequately into a job position in these areas. Six percent reported they were still uncertain of their immediate area of employment and 5% said they planned to work in a skilled trade or as a semi-skilled or

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[1]The Grinnell Scarlet and Black, 83, No. 30, May 28, 1974

unskilled laborer. Most viewed these jobs as temporary, allowing them an income while in graduate or professional school or as a source of travel money.

There appeared to be some changes in the employment picture between the 1973 and 1974 graduates. Fewer of the 1974 than 1973 seniors predicted they would become artists, writers, and teachers while more thought they would enter business or skilled and unskilled occupations.

Fifty-six percent of the 1974 graduates reported they were planning to attend graduate or professional schools in 1974-75.[1] Professional schools are attracting the greatest numbers of Macalester graduates with 7% hoping to attend medical or dental schools and 7% entering law. Psychology (6%), geography (4%), and business administration and economics (4%) were the most frequent graduate school choices.

Again there appeared to be marked changes between 1973 and 1974 in post-undergraduate educational plans. More of the 1973 graduates were expecting to attend medical or dental (9%) or law (12%) professional schools and graduate school in art (4%). Few were enrolling in those graduate departments that were most frequently chosen in 1974.[2]

When given a list of "reasons for your career choice " most of the seniors in both graduating classes indicated that opportunities for freedom of action and enjoyment of working with the kind of people involved were very important while nearly one-half said contributing to society was also very important. Reasons which were not deemed important were that the choice satisfied parents' hopes and allowed for rapid advancement.

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[1] In addition, 9% had plans to continue their academic work on a part-time basis.

[2] Some care must be taken in interpreting these changes since we are dealing with small groups and thus small changes in absolute numbers of students enrolling in the various alternatives.

Two-thirds of the 1974 graduates expected to be employed full-time for the major part of their lives while 15% (56% men and 44% women) were not certain what their employment pattern would be. Only one woman said she expected to work briefly before marriage while 12 graduates (one-half women and one-half men) said they expected only brief intervals of employment and 16 respondents (5 men and 11 women) said they expected part-time employment for the major part of their lives. Thus the only marked difference between men and women in employment pattern was the greater number of women who expected part-time employment as a permanent status. The figures for the 1973 graduates were nearly identical to those of the 1974 graduates.

In terms of their own lives, graduates said having opportunities to be original and creative, developing a meaningful philosophy of life, being useful to society and helpful to others would be most important. Owning a successful business, being politically involved, financially well-off or secure, raising a family, being a leader, or an authority in a field were of little importance. There was a tendency for financial well-being to be more important to the '74 graduates than it was to the '73 graduates.

Summary

The seniors in Macalester's 1973 and 1974 graduating classes felt their academic work and their development of self-understanding constituted the most meaningful and important areas within their four years of college experiences. Interpersonal relationships with students and faculty formed a second important set of experiences while extracurricular, college-sponsored activities were important to very few of the seniors.

Following graduation, nearly one-half of the 1974 seniors predicted they would be working full-time with the occupational areas of business and teaching attracting more seniors than any other. Fifty-six percent of the graduates who responded to the questionnaire were intending to enter graduate school or professional school programs within a year following graduation. Medicine, law, and psychology were the advanced programs most often selected by the 1974 graduates. A somewhat different pattern of employment emerged from the 1973 graduates with more wanting careers as artists, writers and teachers than was true of the 1974 graduates. Also more of the former were planning to attend law school or graduate school in art and fewer were interested in graduate school in psychology, geography, and business.

Most of the graduates said they would be working full-time for the majority of their lives. Having opportunities to be original, creative, and having freedom of action were the most important attributes of a job to these graduates while salary and a chance for advancement were of lesser importance. There was some evidence that salary and financial well-being may be becoming more important to Macalester graduates.

Students felt they had changed during their four years of college but also many felt they had witnessed great changes in Macalester. Some students were critical of the changes, feeling that the College had become more concerned with budget balancing rather than education and that the quality of students was deteriorating. Others, while pointing out a similar trend, felt it was a temporary shift made necessary by financial exigencies. Overall, these graduating seniors looked upon their Macalester experiences very favorably.

Table 1

Satisfaction of 1973 and 1974 Graduating Seniors
With Aspects of Their Macalester Experiences

	Very Satisfied		Satisfied		Dis-satisfied		Very Dis-satisfied	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
The college's academic reputation	27[1]	13	57	74	14	11	2	12
The intellectual environment	22	12	51	68	20	16	7	4
Faculty-student relations	18	27	48	53	26	18	7	2
The quality of classroom instruction	13	14	58	70	23	16	6	0
The variety of courses you could take.....	26	24	51	56	21	16	2	4
Friendships with other students .	40	38	48	52	10	7	2	2
The administration	0	2	29	34	39	42	31	22
Formal and informal opportunities for personal counseling	--	12	--	57	--	24	--	7
Career guidance	--	3	--	38	--	41	--	18
Academic advising	--	7	--	46	--	36	--	12
Your total experience at the college	24	30	63	63	10	6	3	0

[1]All numbers are percents

Table 2

Extent to Which Macalester Experiences Contributed to Student Progress in Various Educational Outcomes

	Very Little	Some-what	Quite a Bit	Very Much	Average
Appreciation of individuality and independence of thought and action ...	3[1]	27	37	33	3.00[2]
Awareness of different philosophies, cultures and ways of life	6	29	38	26	2.85
Background and specialization for further education in some professional, scientific or scholarly field	8	32	31	29	2.81
Appreciation and enjoyment of art, music, drama	9	29	32	29	2.81
Vocabulary, terminology, and facts in various fields of knowledge.....	7	28	43	23	2.81
Understanding one's abilities and limitations, interests, and standards of behavior	4	32	42	21	2.80
Experience and skill in relating to other people	5	36	37	22	2.76
Development of friendships and loyalities of lasting value	10	33	29	28	2.75
Ability to withhold judgment, raise questions, and examine contrary views	7	30	45	18	2.75
Broadened literary acquaintance and appreciation	12	29	33	26	2.73
Ability to see relationships, similarities, and differences between ideas	6	35	39	20	2.73
Tolerance and understanding of other people and their views	8	37	34	20	2.67
Recognizing assumptions, making logical inferences, reaching correct conclusions	12	37	34	17	2.57
Understanding the nature of science, experimentation, and theory.....	18	31	26	25	2.57
Clear, correct, effective communication.....	14	44	28	14	2.42
Basis for improved social and economic status	24	39	29	8	2.22
Understanding concepts of probability proportion, margin of error	26	41	22	12	2.18
Moral and ethical standards	25	44	23	7	2.12
Skills and techniques directly applicable to a job.	46	25	20	9	1.92

[1]Percent

[2]Scored "Very Little"=1, "Somewhat"=2, "Quite a Bit" = 3, and "Very Much" = 4.

Table 3

1973 and 1974 Graduating Seniors Perception of Change Since They Began College

	Increased		Changed Very Little		Decreased	
	1973	1974	1973	1974	1973	1974
Maturity	88	90	11	9	1	1
Self-awareness, self-insight	87	86	12	13	1	0
Intellectual interests in your field	79	81	16	16	5	3
Intellectual interests in general	72	71	21	24	7	1
The firmness of your sense of identity.	61	65	29	30	10	5
Esthetic interests	69	61	26	36	5	3
Emotional stability	57	58	30	36	13	6
Commitment to a vocation	43	52	35	36	22	11
Scope and awareness of ethical standards	58	52	39	45	2	4
Commitment to a particular style of life	48	51	37	40	14	9
Ability to form close relationships	60	50	35	44	5	5
Political concerns or awareness	54	39	35	47	11	14
Concern with social issues	45	34	42	54	13	12
Acceptance of other racial groups	35	29	51	58	14	14
Political liberalism	37	25	53	62	10	13
Religious concerns and beliefs	19	18	49	55	31	27